

June 21, 2006

TO: Interested Parties, Practitioners, Governments, Industry Associates

FROM: NOAA Fisheries, Northwest Region

RE: Public Comment Period and Community Meeting on NOAA Fisheries' Proposed Designation of Critical Habitat for Southern Resident Killer Whales (*Orcinus orca*)

NOAA Fisheries will hold community meetings in Seattle and Friday Harbor (Washington) on July 12, 2006, and July 13, 2006 respectively, regarding our recent proposal to designate critical habitat for Southern Resident killer whales under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). The public comment period for the proposed designation extends through August 14, 2006, and the public meetings are part of our commitment to provide ample opportunities to receive public input.

Meeting Location and Format

The meetings will be held in the evening from 7:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.:

- July 12, 2006, at the Seattle Aquarium, 1483 Alaskan Way, Pier 59, Seattle, WA 98101.
- July 13, 2006, at the Whale Museum, 62 First St. N., Friday Harbor, WA 98250.

There is no need to register; just drop in anytime during the course of the evening event.

The community meetings will be an “open-house” format, allowing all interested members of the public to more effectively engage in the rulemaking process. The general public will have the opportunity to meet with NOAA Fisheries staff to learn more about the proposal and its possible impacts on their communities. There will be an introductory presentation at 7:00 p.m. regarding the Southern Resident killer whale critical habitat proposal and the critical habitat designation process. After the introductory remarks, there will be a facilitated question and answer sessions for participants to raise items of particular interest with a panel of knowledgeable NOAA Fisheries staff. For those who are interested, NOAA staff will remain available for further informal discussion following the presentation and question/answer session. NOAA believes that this format is respectful of the public’s valuable time, and will provide important information to assist the public in providing comments on the proposal. A NOAA staff member will be available to record oral testimony; however, the preferred means of providing information for the official record is via written comment, either prepared in advance of or following the meeting.

Additional Opportunities to Provide Comment

NOAA Fisheries scheduled these community meetings in anticipation that affected stakeholders and members of the public may prefer to discuss this proposal directly with staff during the public comment period. However, this meeting is *not* the only

opportunity to provide input on this proposal. Interested individuals are encouraged to provide input regarding the proposal to NOAA Fisheries by standard mail, email, or the Internet until the scheduled close of the comment period on August 14, 2006. Comments may be submitted: by standard mail to Chief, NMFS, Protected Resources Division, 1201 NE Lloyd Boulevard, Suite 1100, Portland, OR 97232; by email to orcahabitat.nwr@noaa.gov; or via the Internet at <http://www.regulations.gov>.

You may obtain more information, including the relevant *Federal Register* notice and supporting documents, on the Internet at <http://www.nwr.noaa.gov>. Alternatively, you may contact Lynne Barre, NOAA Fisheries, Northwest Region, by phone at (206) 526-4745, or by e-mail at Lynne.Barre@noaa.gov.